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## **UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE FOR CHILDREN**

***First 5 Funding Seeds Broader “Healthy Kids” Program, Supported by  
Senator John Burton and Assembly Speaker Herb Wesson***

**San Francisco** – Amid health care budget cuts statewide, four *First 5* County Commissions have joined together to invest more than \$6.4 million this year to provide comprehensive health coverage for children in the Bay Area. Through the “Healthy Kids” initiative, nearly 7,600 children from birth through age 5 who are ineligible for other publicly funded health insurance programs will have access to health, dental and vision coverage.

*First 5* Santa Clara, San Francisco, San Mateo and Solano County Commissions have joined together with more than 60 health care providers, foundations and community groups to provide a critical health care solution for working families with children in a struggling economy mired by high unemployment in the Bay Area. Currently, health insurance for children is provided in a patchwork manner, with different programs dependent on a child’s age, family income and residency status. Medi-Cal and Healthy Families, for example, offer health coverage to children living in families earning incomes up to 133 percent and 250 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL), respectively. “Healthy Kids” will expand coverage to all children by increasing the income level to 300 percent of the FPL (400 percent in San Mateo County), regardless of residency status, effectively providing all children access to health care. Outreach efforts will also be increased to ensure that eligible children are enrolled in the appropriate plans.

“*First 5* is working to be part of the solution during California’s economic downturn by expanding essential health care services to our youngest children and their families. By investing in our children when they’re young, we’re helping them lead longer, healthier lives – which also translates into greater long-term savings for the state,” said Rob Reiner, chair of *First 5 California*, also known as the California Children and Families Commission. “Access to health insurance means more parents will

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have the opportunity to take their kids to the doctor for regular check-ups, immunizations and treatments for chronic illnesses, giving their children a healthy start that can last a lifetime.”

According to the Children’s Defense Fund, children lacking health coverage have a 150 percent higher death rate than insured children. But even for working families, private insurance is often unaffordable due to the high cost of living in the Bay Area. Because federal standards don’t recognize that “poverty levels” are affected by cost of living variances, programs like *First 5* “Healthy Kids” are needed. Eligibility requirements differ slightly depending on each county’s program, but all extend eligibility beyond the income levels set for Medi-Cal and Healthy Families. For example, in Santa Clara, San Francisco and Solano counties, families of four with incomes up to \$54,300 (300 percent of the FPL) are eligible for “Healthy Kids” coverage. In San Mateo County, families with incomes up to \$72,400 (400 percent of the FPL) are eligible for coverage.

The “Healthy Kids” program covers all children younger than age 19 whose families meet income requirements, regardless of residency status. Benefits in all four programs will include:

- Low-cost comprehensive health, dental and vision insurance
- Prescription coverage
- Preventive care, primary care and immunizations
- Hospital care
- Mental health services
- Emergency care

“This remarkable effort will make a huge difference in the lives of thousands of kids and their families,” said Senate President pro Tem John Burton. “Ensuring children’s early access to health care is a smart investment that will save the state and local communities a ton of money down the road.”

According to the California Health Interview Survey, there are nearly one million uninsured children in California, two-thirds of whom are eligible for publicly funded health insurance. Studies show that children with health insurance receive more regular and preventive health care and continue to lead healthier lives, resulting in lower health care costs in the future. Parents are also five times more likely to seek treatment for their uninsured children at emergency rooms as their regular source of care than

children who have insurance. When children forgo doctors' visits for chronic illnesses due to lack of health coverage, they don't receive the medical care they need to stay healthy and as a result, miss school. Children without insurance are absent from school 25 percent more often than children with insurance. Studies also show that high absentee rates lead to lower academic achievement.

"During this period of state budget crisis, the partnership among First 5 County Commissions is critical to the health and well-being of California's children," said Speaker Herb Wesson. "Following in the footsteps of First 5 LA, this investment will give working families the help they need to raise healthy, happy kids."

The "Healthy Kids" program in all four counties is administered by existing health plans. The San Francisco Health Plan, San Mateo County Children's Health Initiative Coalition, Santa Clara Family Health Plan and the Solano Coalition for Better Health each run programs at the local level offering families low-cost health care options that meet their needs. Through grassroots efforts and local expertise, these programs have developed innovative projects tailored to their communities. This system provides the framework for the *First 5* "Healthy Kids" initiative.

For more information about the "Healthy Kids" program, parents in Santa Clara, San Francisco, San Mateo and Solano counties can call 1-800-KIDS-025 (English) or 1-800-50-NIÑOS (Spanish). Parents will be able to find out if their children may be eligible for "Healthy Kids" or another health insurance program. Additional toll-free phone numbers for parents who speak Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean are also available.

First 5 California (also known as the California Children and Families Commission) and 58 First 5 County Commissions were established after voters passed Proposition 10 in November 1998, adding a 50 cents-per-pack tax on cigarettes to fund education, health, child care and other programs for expectant parents and children up to age 5. Prop. 10 was designed to address the lack of public funding and support for early childhood development in the wake of a growing body of scientific evidence indicating that the emotional, physical, social and developmental environments to which children are exposed have a profound impact on their ability to reach their greatest potential in school and to become productive members of society.